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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of the major and minor modes of a melody on perceptions of shots in a short videotape. One hundred forty-six undergraduate communications students from Queens College in New York were exposed to the experimental situation. Three variables were manipulated: the first shot portrayed a male actor who had either a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression; the second shot depicted either a favorable or unfavorable situation; and the sound track for each version of the videotape consisted of a melody in either the major or minor mode. Findings indicated that music modality influenced the perceived favorableness of the situation; that is, the major mode elicited more favorable responses, while the minor mode effected more unfavorable responses. (Author/KS)

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THE IMPACT OF MUSIC MODALITY IN THE PERCEPTION OF MOVING IMAGES

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Charles M. Berg and Dominic A. Infante

Abstract

This experiment investigated the impact of the major and minor modes of a melody on perceptions of each shot in a short video tape. Three variables were manipulated: the first shot portrayed a male actor who had either a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression; the second shot depicted either a favorable or unfavorable situation; the sound track for each version of the video tape consisted of a melody in either the major or minor mode. The central hypothesis of the study was supported. Music modality influenced the perceived favorableness of the situation. Two additional hypotheses were supported while two other hypotheses received either partial or no support.

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CS 501 366

In conceptualizing how we derive meaning from a particular television or film sequence it is useful to consider television and film as eclectic media embracing several coding or semiologic systems, e.g., language, facial expressions, gestures, proxemic relationships, dress, music, and structural linkages of the media such as fades, dissolves, superimpositions, and objective shot-subjective shot couplings. Meaning in this context is dependent upon the composite of information bits embedded within the various codes present within the sequence and our ability to "read" these codes. The reading of different codes is influenced by their interactions with other codes, their legibility, and our familiarity or knowledge of the codes. In addition to stimulating the meaning of a television or film sequence that we are watching at a particular moment, the cluster of information bits also influences our predictions about what is going to happen next.

One of the codes least studied in connection with media is music. This is a reflection of the visual bias of media researchers, a bias based on an understandable preoccupation with the visual component of television and film, and a general lack of knowledge of music among media specialists.

Music's affective powers have been long recognized. The ancient Greeks, for example, believed that various combinations of tones (modes) were capable of inducing different emotional states. The Mixolydian mode was thought to make men sad, the Dorian to produce a settled and moderate disposition, and the Phrygian to inspire

enthusiasm.

Musicians and composers have realized that the elements of music are capable of manipulation so as to produce particular effects. One such element is modality. Technically, modality refers to the arrangement of the eight diatonic tones of an octave according to one of certain fixed schemes of their intervals. The major mode is constructed with full steps between scale degrees with the exception of the half-step intervals between the 3rd and 4th, and 7th and 8th degrees. The Dorian mode, a member of the family of minor modes which will be referred to hereafter as the minor mode, is constructed with full steps between scale degrees with the exception of the half-step intervals between the 2nd and 3rd, and 6th and 7th degrees. Figure 1 illustrates the major and minor mode constructions.

Figure 1 about here

In the evolution of Western harmonic practice, the major and minor modes have acquired a set of connotative meanings. When feelings of happiness, hopefulness and stability have been intended, musicians have traditionally had recourse to the major mode. On the other hand, when the expression of sadness, pessimism and instability have been desired, it has been the minor mode that has been deployed.

Theoretical notions about the affective characteristics of the major and minor modes have been explored empirically. Hevner investigated whether the historically assumed characteristics of

the major and minor modes are apparent to listeners.[1] Subjects listened to various compositions and checked from a list the adjectives which were descriptive of each composition. The results supported previous notions as to what is stimulated by each mode. Individual differences such as musical background and training, musical ability, and intelligence were not essential in discriminating the mood effects of the two modes.

When music functions as a component in complex communication systems like television and film, the implications of specific musical variables such as modality become very important in the determination of the ways in which those communication systems stimulate meaning. Again, it is useful to conceptualize television and film as eclectic media operating in two channels (visual and audio) and including a wide range of coding systems such as music, facial expressions, and structural linkages, e.g., objective shot-subjective shot couplings.

Concerning the structural implications of television and film, viewers who have experience with the media come to the viewing event with a set of expectations about transitions from one shot to the next. In the case of an objective medium or close shot showing an actor looking off-screen, the media-literate viewer expects the next shot to disclose what the actor is looking at. That is, the viewer expects the objective shot to be followed by a subjective shot from the perspective of the actor. When several codes combine, the derivation of meaning is the product of their interactions. For example, if there is a juxtaposition of music in the major mode, a medium or close shot and an off-screen glance, the viewer who is experienced

with the respective musical and nonverbal media codes would be provided with a cluster of information bits which should lead him to predict that the subsequent shot will depict something that is favorable and pleasant.

The present study explored the impact of music modality on the perceptions of a television sequence. Three media codes were manipulated. A melody was composed and recorded in two forms, with all musical variables held constant except modality. That is, a medody was recorded in the major mode and then in the minor mode. The second variable consisted of three forms of an actor's facial expression as revealed by an objective close-up shot. An actor looked off-screen with either a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression. The third variable involved the subjective shot (the shot from the perspective of the actor) which depicted either a favorable or unfavorable situation.

The hypotheses were formulated within the theoretical framework outlined above. That is, the assumptions were that music modality has acquired connotative meanings which influence perceptions of a television sequence and that nonverbal codes interact with music to further modify how the sequence is perceived.

The central hypothesis of this study was: Favorable and unfavorable situations, whether preceded by an actor who has a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression, will be perceived by viewers as more favorable when the music in the audio channel is in the major

mode as compared to the minor mode. This predicted main effect for music modality specifies that the favorableness of the viewer's feelings about the object of a shot from the actor's perspective will vary as a function of whether the objective-subjective coupling is accompanied by music in the major or minor mode. For example, when an actor with a happy expression is looking at a favorable situation the situation should be perceived as more favorable when the audio channel contains a melody in the major as compared to minor mode; when an actor with a sad expression is looking at an unfavorable situation the situation should be perceived as less unfavorable (the situation will not seem so bad) when accompanied by a melody in the major mode.

The second and third hypotheses focused on how music modality and the actor's facial expression in the objective shot (the first shot) influence the expectations viewers form of the favorableness of the situation in the subjective shot (the second shot), before they actually see the second shot. The second hypothesis was: Expectations as to how favorable the situation will be in the next shot will be highest when an objective shot of an actor's face is accompanied by music in the major as compared to the minor mode. The third hypothesis was: Expectations as to how favorable the situation will be in the next shot will be highest when the objective shot depicts an actor with a happy facial expression, next highest when the actor has a neutral facial expression, and lowest when the actor has a sad facial expression. This hypothesis posits a linear

relationship between the degree of happiness in an actor's facial expression and the expected favorableness of the situation which the actor is viewing.

The fourth hypothesis was concerned with how music modality influences the viewer's perception of an actor's facial expression: An actor with a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression will be perceived by viewers as happier or less sad when the shot is accompanied by music in the major as compared to the minor mode. Thus, even when the actor has a sad expression, music in the major mode should cause the expression to be perceived as less sad than when the expression is accompanied by music in the minor mode.

The fifth hypothesis focused on viewers' perceptions of the consistency of the various combinations of the three independent variables. On the basis of Paolo Milano's concept of dominant artistic language,[2] and the unobtrusive nature of the two experimental musical treatments, it was assumed that information presented in the visual channel would have greater impact than information presented in the audio channel. Therefore, in terms of perceived consistency, it would be expected that inconsistencies perceived between shots (e.g., happy facial expression—unfavorable situation) would be more noticeable that inconsistencies between the images and music (e.g., sad facial expression and unfavorable situation—major mode). The hypothesis was: The most consistency will be perceived when the two images and background music are consistent; less consistency will be

perceived when the images are inconsistent with the background music; the least consistency will be perceived when the two images are inconsistent.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 146 students enrolled in six sections of the introductory course in communication at Queens College of the City University of New York during the Spring semester of 1975. The students participated in the study in order to fulfill a course research requirement.

Procedures

A melody was composed in two forms, the first in the major mode and the second in the minor mode. The melody was composed according to several requirements. The melody had to match the ten second duration of each video shot. The melody in the major mode had to emphasize the crucial third scale degree (mediant) which is the primary determinant of modality. Of the major mode melody's 25 beats, ten fell on the third or mediant scale degree; eight fell on the first or tonic scale degree (the scale's center of gravity which determines tonality); four fell on the second or supertonic degree; two fell on the fourth or subdominant scale degree; and one fell on the fifth or dominant scale degree.

After composing the melody in the major mode, another version of the melody was written with each third degree lowered by a half-

step, i.e., lowered from G♯ to G . This simple procedure transformed the modality of the melody from major to minor. Figure 2 presents the scores for the two melodies.

Figure 2 about here

So as to adhere to the generally standard television and film practice of keeping the music as background, the melody was constructed using step-wise movement, i.e., each note moving only one scale degree either up or down. This follows the convention which asserts that step-wise movement is smoother, more settled and less dynamic than disjunct melodic movement. The one exception to the use of step-wise melodic movement occurs at the beginning of the melody where the anacrusis or upbeat moves from the fifth (dominant) to the first (tonic) scale degree.

In keeping with the aim of having the music simple and unobtrusive, the melody was performed with a C flute playing in the middle register. It was decided that a simple chordal accompaniment would help reinforce the melody's two modal conditions. These accompaniments were provided by an acoustic guitar.

Each experimental video sequence contained two shots, in color, with background music. The first shot was of a male actor who had either a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression. Each variation of this shot was ten seconds in length. Image variables

(e.g., camera angle, lighting, and the actor's line of gaze to screen-right) were held constant for all three variations of facial expression. The second shot in the videotape depicted either a favorable or unfavorable situation. Each version of this shot was ten seconds in length. In the favorable situation a two-year old boy was smiling while enthusiastically playing with a pounding toy. In the unfavorable situation the boy looked very distressed and cried throughout the shot.

The audio recordings of the major and minor mode melodies, and the videotape recordings of the actor with the happy, neutral, and sad facial expressions and the favorable and unfavorable situations were edited to produce the 12 experimental videotapes. Each of the 12 experimental videotapes opened with a ten second shot of a male actor who had either a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression which was accompanied by a melody in either the major or minor mode. The shot faded to black and then was followed by a ten second shot of either a favorable or unfavorable situation accompanied by the background music from the first shot.

One practice tape was recorded. It opened with a ten second shot of a male actor (not the same actor who appeared in the experimental sequences). The second ten second shot was of a woman reading a book. An unobtrusive music sound track accompanied the film.

The subjects in each of the six classes were randomly divided into two groups. Each of the 12 groups of subjects was randomly assigned to view one of the 12 experimental videotapes.

At the beginning of the experiment the experimenters explained that the purpose of the study was to investigate the way that people perceive each shot in a short videotape. It was alleged that 24 short videotapes, produced by mass media majors in the Communication Department, were being shown to students in order to study a variety of television techniques. The subjects were told that they would view two of the videotapes and give their reactions to each shot. Each class was then randomly divided in half and both groups viewed a randomly assigned version of the experimental videotape on color video monitors in separate rooms.

The subjects received a booklet which contained scales for responses to each shot. Each of the 12 groups of subjects first viewed the same practice tape. This was done to familiarize the subjects with the procedures that would be used in responding to the experimental tape. The subjects were not aware that the first tape was a practice tape.

After the practice tape, the subjects viewed the first shot of the experimental videotape (which contained the male actor with either a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression. with the melody in either the major or minor mode). After the shot was viewed, the videotape was stopped. The subjects then completed two scales. The first scale was: "The actor in the first shot of Tape II seemed to me to be: [a seven-point scale followed which spanned from extremely happy to extremely sad]." The second scale was: "The situation that he is observing probably is: [a seven-point scale followed

which spanned from extremely favorable to extremely unfavorable]." This task was completed in about 15 seconds.

The second shot, which depicted either a favorable or unfavorable situation with the same music that accompanied the first shot, was then played. After this shot the subjects responded to the following scales. The first scale was: "Generally, the feelings which I experienced regarding the situation in the second shot of Tape II were: [a seven-point scale followed which spanned from extremely favorable to extremely unfavorable]." Next, semantic differential scales were included for measuring three dimensions of the male actor's image: expertness, trustworthiness, and dynamism.[3] This was an exploratory aspect of the experiment as no hypotheses were formulated regarding the actor's image. Finally, the subjects responded to an item which asked: "Generally, the various elements in the second tape were: [a seven-point scale followed which spanned from extremely consistent to extremely inconsistent]." When the subjects viewed the practice tape these same scales were used with the exception of the consistency scale. This was omitted to avoid having a consistency frame of reference especially salient while viewing the experimental video tape as this might have influenced the favorableness perceptions.

RESULTS

The happy-sad scale was scored from 1 to 7, with 1 repre-

senting extremely sad and 7, extremely happy. The scale for the expected favorableness of the situation (prediction of favorableness before the situation was viewed) and the scale for perceived favorableness (perception of favorableness after the situation was viewed) were each scored from 1 to 7 with 1 representing extremely unfavorable and 7, extremely favorable. The perceived consistency scale also was scored from 1 to 7 with 1 representing extremely inconsistent and 7, extremely consistent. The three semantic differential scales for each of the three dimensions of the actor's image (expertness, trustworthiness, and dynamism) were scored from 1 to 7. The possible range for each dimension was from 3-21 with 21 representing the most favorable perception. The dependent variable means are contained in Table 1. Three-way analysis of variance with an unweighted means solution for unequal n's was used for each dependent variable. An alpha level of .05 was set for all tests. One-tailed t-tests were utilized for the cell contrasts specified by the hypotheses. A summary of the analyses is presented in Table 2.

Tables 1 and 2 about here

The actor's expression was rated 6.08 in the happy condition, 3.34 in the neutral, and 2.62 in the sad. This effect was significant beyond the .001 level indicating that the actor's

facial expression was manipulated successfully.

The perceived favorableness of the situation designed as favorable was 5.85 while the marginal mean for the situation intended as unfavorable was 2.86. This effect also was significant beyond the .001 level which suggests that the favorableness of the situation was manipulated successfully.

The central hypothesis in this study predicted that favorable and unfavorable situations, whether preceded by an actor who has a happy, neutral, or sad facial expression, will be perceived by viewers as more favorable when the music in the audio channel is in the major mode as compared to the minor mode. The predicted main effect for music modality was significant. This result supports the central hypothesis of the study. The favorableness mean for the major mode was 4.59 and 4.12 for the minor mode.

The second and third hypotheses were concerned with the effects of music modality and the facial expresssion of the actor on the viewers' expectations of the favorableness of a forthcoming situation. The second hypothesis predicted that music modality would influence the expected favorableness of a situation. The mean for the major mode condition was 4.12 and 3.92 for the minor mode. This predicted difference was not statistically significant. The significant interaction revealed that the means for four pairs of the cells supported the prediction. Two pairs of cells had

means which were opposite to the prediction. The interaction was caused by two cells (happy and neutral expression, unfavorable situation) with minor mode music that expected a more favorable situation than the corresponding two cells with major mode music. However, since the favorableness of the situation had not yet been manipulated when the expected favorableness measure was taken, the interaction would seem to be due to random error. Thus, no real support was observed for the second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis predicted a linear relationship between the degree of happiness in an actor's facial expression and the expected favorableness of the situation. The significant main effect for the facial expression of the actor supports this hypothesis. The marginal means regarding expected favorability for the happy, neutral, and sad expressions were 5.98, 3.38, and 2.69 respectively.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that a melody in the major mode would cause an actor's facial expressions to be perceived as happier when compared to the way the facial expresssions are perceived when accompanied by the melody in the minor mode. The mean for the major mode was 4.14 and 3.89 for the minor mode. This predicted difference was not significant ($p \leq .09$). The significant interaction revealed support for the hypothesis in the condition where the actor had a sad facial expression. That is, the actor was not perceived "as sad" when accompanied by a melody in the major

as compared to minor mode.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that the least consistency would be perceived when the two images are inconsistent; more consistency would be perceived when the images are inconsistent with the background music; and the most consistency would be perceived when the images and music are consistent. The conditions with the neutral facial expression were not included in this analysis as the hypothesis would have had to be expanded greatly to account for an additional degree of inconsistency. The images were inconsistent in four conditions (in Table 1 these conditions have consistency means of 3.14, 3.42, 3.20, 2.18). The mean of the consistency ratings for these four conditions was 2.99. The images were inconsistent with the music in two conditions (in Table 1 these conditions have consistency means of 4.73 and 2.82). The overall mean for these two conditions was 3.78. The images and music were consistent in two conditions (in Table 1 these conditions have means of 5.29 and 4.29). The overall mean for these two conditions was 4.79. The 2.99 mean is significantly less than the 3.78 mean, $t = 1.93$, $p < .05$, $df = 67$, one-tailed test. The 3.78 mean is significantly less than the 4.79 mean, $t = 2.24$, $p < .025$, $df = 48$, one-tailed test. These results support the fifth and final hypothesis of the study.

Three dimensions of the actor's image were measured and analyzed even though no hypotheses were posited. This exploratory

aspect of the study yielded two interesting results. The perceived trustworthiness of the actor varied as a function of his facial expression. The means for the happy, neutral, and sad conditions were 15.79, 14.05, and 13.25 respectively which resulted in a highly significant main effect. This same pattern was observed for the perceived dynamism dimension of the actor's image where the respective means for the happy, neutral and sad conditions were 13.20, 11.82, and 10.67.

DISCUSSION

This experiment supported our central hypothesis as to the effect of music modality on the perceived favorableness of a situation in a video tape; i.e., the major mode caused the favorable situation to be perceived as more favorable and the unfavorable situation as less unfavorable; the minor mode caused the favorable situation to appear less favorable and the unfavorable situation as more unfavorable. These results corroborate Hevner's research[4] and the assumptions of contemporary media composers which suggest that modality is a crucial determinant of the audience's perception of a television program or a motion picture.

The main effect for modality observed in this study should not be interpreted as an effect that will occur regardless of other musical variables. The music composed for this study was designed to be unobtrusive and to emphasize modality. This was accomplished by the repeated use of the third or mediant scale degree in the

melody, with a simple chordal accompaniment. Other music variables were held constant in order to isolate the effects of modality. Altering any of the music variables controlled for in this study should modify the impact of modality. For example, if the tempo was picked up from the moderato level used in the experiment to a brisk prestissimo, it might be that the exciting, turbulent, agitated affects of the fast tempo would offset the brooding, sad connotations of the minor mode. When other music variables are considered, the possibilities for modifying the impact of modality are many.

Generalizations about the impact of music on perceptions of moving images should be tempered further by the specific characteristics of the individual media. An example is sound quality. The television set's small, low quality speaker produces aural stimuli at an amplitude, frequency, and quality that are markedly inferior to the stimuli transmitted by the better theatrical sound systems in cinemas. Since this means the television viewer obtains less musical information than the theater viewer, it seems reasonable to speculate that, with other variables held constant, the impact of music on television is less than in a film theater. However, channel capacities aside, it is probable that spectators in a theater are more influenced by music when compared to television viewers. Intuitively, this speculation seems valid because in a theater distractions are kept to a minimum thus allowing for

a more focused experience (which is further reinforced by the spectator's commitment to a closer reading of the film because of the money paid for admission). In contrast, television viewing is commonly accompanied by numerous auditory and visual distractions.

This study dealt with only one musical variable, modality. Future studies should investigate other musical variables, e.g., pitch, tempo, dynamics, orchestration, and timbre.[5] These variables should be examined not only in isolation, but also in relation to other musical variables, in relation to other elements in the audio channel (e.g., dialogue, narration, and sound effects), and in relation to various elements of the video channel (e.g., camera angle, camera movement, lighting, color, and editing). Such studies should lead to a more complete understanding and appreciation of music's influence on viewers' responses to moving images whether presented via television or film.

Music is commonly present in human communication systems. Future research should explore how music operates in such systems. For example, music is played in many stores and shopping malls. Customer buying behavior may be affected by particular types of music. Offices and factories play music while employees are working. The effects of music types on worker productivity should produce an interesting line of research. Also, it is not unusual for music to be present during interpersonal communication. Research might discover that certain types of music facilitate

persuasion while other types inhibit persuasion. Persuasion in a public speaking situation might be affected if the speech is preceded by music which stimulates the audience to experience a given emotional state. Since music is such a ubiquitous element in our society, more research is needed which isolates its impact.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Hevner, Kate. "The Affective Character of the Major and Minor Modes in Music." The American Journal of Psychology, 48, 1935, pp. 103-118.

[2]Milano, Paolo. "Music in the Film: Notes for a Morphology." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 91, 1941, pp. 89-94.

[3]Tuppen, Christopher J.S. "Dimensions of Communicator Credibility: An Oblique Solution." Speech Monographs, 41, 1974, pp. 253-260.

[4]"The Affective Character of the Major and Minor Modes in Music."

[5]For a discussion of how various musical elements function within the context of the silent film see:

Berg, Charles M. An Investigation of the Motives for and the Realization of Music to Accompany the American Silent Film, 1896-1927. New York: Arno Press, in press.

TABLE 1

DEPENDENT VARIABLE MEANS

Condition:	n	Happy-Sad Exp. of Actor	Expected Favorable-ness of Sit.	Perceived Favorable-ness of Sit.	Perceived Consistency of Film	Trust. of Actor	Expertness of Actor	Dynamism of Actor
Music in Major Mode								
Happy Exp., Fav. Sit.	14	6.14	6.14	6.21	5.29	16.29	12.07	12.50
Neutral Exp., Fav. Sit.	11	3.73	3.82	6.09	3.36	15.46	14.82	12.55
Sad Exp., Fav. Sit.	14	2.86	3.14	5.57	3.14	12.79	13.64	10.00
Happy Exp., Unfav. Sit.	10	5.90	5.60	3.50	3.20	14.60	13.30	12.40
Neutral Exp., Unfav. Sit.	14	3.14	3.21	2.71	4.64	13.07	13.29	11.57
Sad Exp., Unfav. Sit.	11	3.09	2.82	3.46	2.82	12.73	13.64	10.36
Music in Minor Mode								
Happy Exp., Fav. Sit.	11	6.09	6.00	5.82	4.73	16.27	14.00	14.09
Neutral Exp., Fav. Sit.	12	2.67	2.58	5.75	3.08	13.83	14.92	11.58
Sad Exp., Fav. Sit.	12.	2.33	2.17	5.67	3.42	13.42	13.58	12.58
Happy Exp., Unfav. Sit.	11	6.18	6.18	2,82	2.18	16.00	14.18	13.82
Neutral Exp., Unfav. Sit.	12.	3.83	3.92	2.67	3.25	13.83	13.33	11.58
Sad Exp., Unfav. Sit.	14	2.21	2.64	2.00	4.29	14.07	13.64	9.71

Exp.= Expression Fav.= Favorable Unfav.= Unfavorable Sit.= Situation Trust.= Trustworthiness

TABLE 2

ANALYSES OF VARIANCE SUMMARY

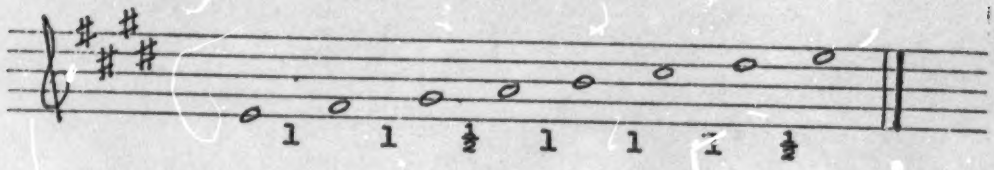
Source	df	Happy-Sad Exp. of Actor	Expected Favorableness of Sit.	Perceived Favorableness of Sit.	Perceived Consistency of Film	Trust. of Actor	Expertness of Actor	Dynamism of Actor
Fav. of Sit. (A)	1	.36	.28	206.27 **	2.78	1.48	.24	1.85
Exp. of Actor (B)	2	192.65 **	146.82 **	1.38	.91	8.55 **	.52	9.66 **
Melody Mode (C)	1	2.87	1.58	5.11 *	.91	.66	.72	1.99
A x B	2	.50	.91	.33	12.86 **	.82	1.39	.45
A x C	1	3.63	12.20 **	1.52	.06	2.15	.09	.74
B x C	2	2.47	1.96	.48	4.52 *	.71	.66	1.57
A x B x C	2	4.17 *	1.40	1.70	1.69	.22	.10	1.77
Error	134							

* $p<.025$ ** $p<.001$

FIGURE 1

MAJOR AND MINOR MODE CONSTRUCTIONS

Major Mode (Key of E)



Minor Mode (Key of E)

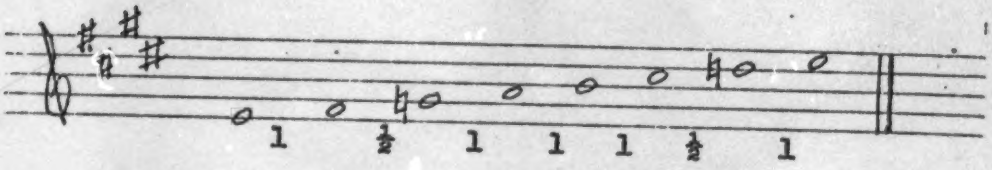
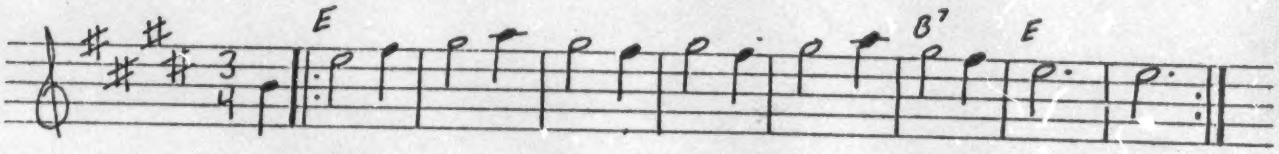


FIGURE 2

SCORES FOR THE TWO MELODIES

The Major Melody



The Minor Melody